Foreword

Transformation of monolithic institutions such as those in government sector takes years or even decades to materialize. Plagued with phlegmatic and often lackadaisical work systems, government organizations tend to resist dramatic changes usually associated with technology based interventions. During the last decade, however, the pace at which ICT technologies have accelerated the transformation at government institutions is beyond imagination. The manifestation of this transformation process in the form of electronic government, and electronic governance reflects the willingness of governments across the world to break away from the tedious bureaucratic procedures and bring transparency in operations. Recently, I heard about a novel initiative by traffic law enforcement agencies in a developing country to reach out to and connect with citizens by creating a Facebook page and soliciting suggestions to improve the traffic situation in the city. This might seem trivial today but couple of years back, I could not have fathomed the thought of a government agency reaching out to citizens in a developing country in such a manner. Such initiatives underline the radical transformation that is sweeping through government institutions across the world. When I explored more for such initiatives, I found tons of similar examples across the world, both in developing and developed countries. This gives me hope that electronic governments can be catalyst for long desired reforms in government institutions.

As an academician, I was elated when Dr. Shareef told me about his plans to edit a book on stakeholders’ adoption of e-government services. I could see how this book could help further the understanding about challenges surrounding e-government efforts. Therefore, I applaud Dr. Shareef for undertaking the initiative to put together a compilation of empirical studies, best practices and experiences about how stakeholders are embracing e-government across the world.

As we all know, electronic government initiatives have come a long way since the first generation of e-government where the prime objective was to catalog the information for stakeholders’ use. Some countries have been at the forefront of e-government adoption, while others have yet to get on e-government bandwagon. Some countries have had pleasant experience with e-government initiatives while others have struggled or are still struggling. Despite a large body of research on e-government, we do not know for sure what makes such initiatives succeed or fail which makes it challenging to develop a coherent and concrete guidance to support e-government initiatives. This is where, I believe, this book can be instrumental in enhancing our understanding of issues surrounding the stakeholders’ adoption of e-government services.

The organization of the book in four different sections provides a logical structure for the discussion on e-government adoption. The first section looks at e-government adoption from a managerial or strategic perspective, suggesting a strategic planning framework and exploring different adoption paradigms. Any initiative at the government level in general, and a technology initiative such as e-government in particular,
faces a plethora of issues such as budget scarcity, group conflict, cultural norms, and prevailing patterns of social and political behavior. An e-government adoption process is as much a technological process as it is a political and social process. From this standpoint, this section provides guidance to readers on existing adoption paradigms and possibility of developing new ones to suit one’s specific context.

The second section dwells upon the e-government experiences across three countries, providing details on level of digital preparedness of cities in a developing country and consumers’ perception of e-government services. The potential impact of e-government extends well beyond simply delivering services online. It represents a shift in how citizens conceive of government itself and, fundamentally, how citizens think about democracy—from a client-customer model to a forum in which important decisions are undertaken collaboratively. This section underlines the criticality of citizens’ engagement in the e-government process.

Extending the citizens’ perspective presented earlier, the third section of the book looks at e-government adoption models across countries. By highlighting the issues and challenges at each stage of e-government maturity, this section provides guidance on how to enhance proliferation of e-government services. Technology—particularly collaborative and social networking services—presents new opportunities to not only open up government and make it more accessible, but also facilitates greater information sharing. By focusing on technological options such as smart phones, PDAs, cell phones, or even social networks, governments across the world have a real opportunity to extend the range of their offerings.

As mentioned earlier, some countries have had successful experience with e-government while others are either just getting started or are struggling with their current initiatives. The final section of the book looks at status of some of these e-government initiatives in different countries and suggests metrics for evaluating e-government projects. This section will be highly valuable to practitioners who are ready to make a case for e-government in their respective countries and also for those who would like to assess the success of their current e-government initiatives.

In essence, I am convinced this book would be a good addition to current collection of experiences and best practices in e-government adoption and usage across countries. I envision the day when e-government will eventually lead to collaborative multi-stakeholder planning where public would be engaged with the government in dealing with complex public policy issues such as water management or adaptation to climate change. I sincerely believe that as researchers, it is our responsibility to contribute to this vision by building research models, disseminating best practices, and analyzing issues surrounding electronic government, and I hope this book will lead the way.

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